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View points

The Reagan Plan for Agency

If the GOP ticket wins, the CIA's prospects might improve, but a Reagan intelligence white paper calls for a new service with sweeping powers. It could overshadow Bush's old outfit.

By Jeff Stein

When Ronald Reagan finally picked ex-CIA Director George Bush to be his running mate last week, I was sitting around the television with a group of Latin American exiles. "This is just like Brazil!" one exclaimed. "The head of the secret police is going to end up running the country."

It will be interesting to see just what influence the CIA will have if the Reagan-Bush ticket is elected in November. It is true that Bush was immensely liked by the cloak-and-dagger crew during his short stay at its Langley, Va., headquarters (June, 1975, to January, 1976), and he employed perhaps 40 ex-CIA officers in his campaign organization, including his own director of security, Robert Gambino. But predictions of some kind of a CIA *putsch* organized out of the vice president's office are perhaps off the mark.

For one thing, there exists a definite anti-CIA feeling among Reagan's closest foreign-policy and national-security advisers, many of whom were members of the Ford administration's "B-team," which was set up to offer competing analyses of CIA estimates of Soviet missile strength. And in lengthy conversations with Richard V. Allen, Reagan's principal adviser on these matters, I came away with the definite feeling that Allen thought the CIA was just not "tough enough" when it came to sizing up the Russians.

The principal evidence of my conclusions exists in a special white paper on the intelligence community put together by a group of ex-military and ex-CIA officers under Allen's direction last year.

While the white paper certainly expresses fondness for covert action at home and abroad—popularly known as "dirty tricks"—it also leaves an impression that the CIA may have to share the back alleys of the

world with other U.S. agencies, particularly the FBI and the Pentagon, and may have to be prepared to give up some of its power to a new "intelligence czar" in the White House. All this portends, of course, a classic Washington power struggle come January if Reagan wins.

Here are the highlights of the intelligence reorganization plan:

• Domestic spying.

The plans call for maintaining joint CIA-FBI files on "counterintelligence and counter-terrorism" in a special section to be created in the Justice Department or a wholly new, independent agency. "Here," the policy paper proposes, "joint teams of officers from both the domestic and foreign intelligence services would lawfully look at the same data."

• Checks on CIA analysts.

Among Reagan's advisers, there is a congenital suspicion of Russian military analysts at the CIA. To correct that, it is proposed that the role of the Defense Intelligence Agency be strengthened as a source of "alternative analysis," and that a permanent kind of "B-team" be set up to further checkmate the CIA, similar to the "wise old men" of the defunct Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

• Shift covert action away from the CIA.

"The clandestine services have been of inestimable value to our national security," the white paper claims. "They have performed some of the most important of CIA's unique functions, and they should be strengthened."

But the Reagan team doesn't think the CIA can do the job and wants to create a brand new "Foreign Operations Service" that would bring under one roof both information-collection and counterintelligence activities. As a new intelligence superagency combining many functions of both the FBI and CIA, the FOS would actually be a mirror image of the dreaded Soviet KGB. It would, the plan proposes, be "wholly clandestine."

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